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Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

Ten years ago, the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Assn. added one day to the annual convention for seminars. Topics like labor problems and insurance dilemmas were discussed at great length and brought to serious verbal conclusions.

At small extra fees, the programs were a bargain. But don't misunderstand, this isn't claiming these sessions were for the weak-of-will, or the faint-of-heart; because many a grim-throated speaker mounted the rostrum and chilled the audiences with news of foreign fleets laden in lambs headed for our coasts, and warnings of raging on-slaughts of ferocious fire ants all but appearing on the near horizons.

Last July, at the meeting in San Angelo, the hottest topic was the use or misuse of the Endangered Species Act, spiced also by a few tidbits of oncoming controls of private property by the wetlands program.

The first speaker represented a group of herders out west of the Pecos River who had had a very strong dose of the encroachments possible under the cloak of the Act.

With or without an angle on the endangered species problems, I was having enough trouble finding a seat to confuse the head usher at Carnegie Hall. Up front, a press photographer was shooting off flashes so hot and handy that his strobes were threatening to blind the panel and burn the retinas of the bystanders. Three rows behind this wild cameraman was too far away to hear the speaker; and once I was located in a seat by an old friend, he said, "Noelke, you aren't going to get to whisper and write me notes all during the program like you did when we sat together at the meeting in Del Rio."

The subject matter turned out to be exactly as announced, except after hearing all the consequences of the law, it seemed to me that the first preferred usage of the title "endangered species" needed to be added to the name of the sheep herders' association.

Everybody seemed so heartsick at the end of the program that I didn't stay for the coffee break. Two or three state legislators were standing around out front; but considering the kind of luck we were having in politics, I didn't want to be seen with anyone in that game.